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Department of State **TELEGRAM**

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INFO OCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-02 INR-08 L-04 NSAE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1270
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
CINCPAC
AMCONSUL DANANG
USDEL FRANCE
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 2378

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (PARA 4)

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

SUBJECT: SENATOR THUAN COMMENTS ON PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

1. SUMMARY: SENATOR TRAN QUANG THUAN RECENTLY DISCUSSED WITH US AT LENGTH AND IN AN UNUSUALLY INFORMATIVE FASHION THE FORTHCOMING PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. THUAN SAID THAT WHILE AN QUANG WILL SUPPORT MINH IT HAS NOT YET DECIDED THE EXTENT OF ITS SUPPORT. HE INDICATED IMPATIENCE WITH MINH'S FAILURE TO CLARIFY HIS POLICY POSITIONS AND HIS SLOWNESS IN SHAPING HIS CAMPAIGN. THUAN STATES HE HAS RECOMMENDED TO MINH A CATHOLIC VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. AN QUANG PLANS TO COMPETE HARD IN ANY EVENT FOR THE LOWER HOUSE ELECTION, PLANNING FOR 35-40 SEATS. END SUMMARY.

2. IN CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFFS FEB 15, THUAN SAID THAT AN QUANG AND MINH ARE ENGAGED IN CONTINUING BUT AS YET INCONCLUSIVE TALKS ON BUDDHIST SUPPORT FOR THE GENERAL'S PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN. MINH HAS REITERATED TO THUAN HIS DETERMINATION TO RUN BUT AVOIDED CLARIFYING HIS POLICY POSI-

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY Ivan Izubery DATE 1/26/82
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TIONS TO AN QUANG'S SATISFACTION. THUAN EXPRESSED DISAPPOINTMENT WITH MINH'S VAGUENESS AND IMPLIED "MORE REALISTIC" CHURCH LEADERS, NOTABLY THICH THIEN MINH, ARE BECOMING IMPATIENT WITH MINH.

3. THUAN CLAIMED THAT AN QUANG WOULD PROBABLY REACH A DECISION ON SUPPORT FOR MINH WITHIN THE NEXT TWO WEEKS. THE CHURCH WILL DEFINITELY SUPPORT MINH, THUAN ASSERTED; ISSUE IS HOW MUCH AND WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT.

4. THUAN INDICATED THAT MINH HAS MADE LITTLE PROGRESS IN ORGANIZING HIS PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN. EXPRESSING FRUSTRATION, THUAN NOTED THAT MINH HAS NOT ENLARGED HIS CIRCLE OF ADVISORS, AND HAS MADE LITTLE EFFORT TOWARD OGGANIZING A CADRE STRUCTURE. HE ADDED THERE IS STILL NO DETAILED PLANNING, NO CAMPAIGN STAFF, AND LITTLE MONEY FOR THE CAMPAIGN. HE DISCOUNTED RUMORS THAT MINH IS CONSIDERING FORMER ECONOMICS MINISTER AU TRANH THANH CAMPAIGN MANAGER, AND SAID HE (THUAN) MIGHT TAKE THAT POSITION IN ORGANIZING BUDDHIST SUPPORT.

5. THUAN SAID MINH ALSO IS STILL UNDECIDED ABOUT HIS VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. THUAN URGED HIM TO SELECT A PROMINENT CATHOLIC TO BALANCE THE TICKET, SUGGESTING FORMER SENATOR NGUYEN GIA HIEN (CHAIRMAN OF THE NORTHERN CATHOLIC GSF), JUSTICE TRAN MINH THIET, AND SENATOR HUYNH VAN CAO (LEADER OF PRO-ADMINISTRATION SENATE GROUP). HE DISCOUNTED THE PROSPECTS OF MINH RUNNING WITH VICE PRESIDENT KY BUT NOTED THAT KY AND MINH HAVE RECENTLY DISCUSSED ELECTION. THUAN IMPLIED THAT EVEN KY WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE TO AN QUANG AS CO-RUNNER, BUT WOULD REPRESENT A PROBLEM FOR MINH.

6. COMMENT: WE BELIEVE THUAN, WHO IS CLOSE TO AND OFTEN THE SPOKESMAN FOR THICH TRI QUANG, IS EMERGING AS THE MOST INFLUENTIAL AN QUANG LAY POLITICIAN. THUAN IS FRIENDLY WITH AMERICANS AND IS A FORCE FOR MODERATION AND REALISM IN BUDDHIST CIRCLES. HIS COMMENTS ON AN QUANG'S RELATIONS WITH MINH INDICATE THE GENERAL IS STILL REFRAINING FROM COMMITTING HIMSELF TO AN QUANG ON POSITIONS AND PERSONNEL, BUT THAT SENTIMENT FOR MINH AMONG THE BUDDHIST RANK AND FILE MAY FORCE THE MORE SENIOR BONZES INTO EARLY SUPPORT FOR MINH.
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